

ST. FRANCIS CATHOLIC CEMETERY

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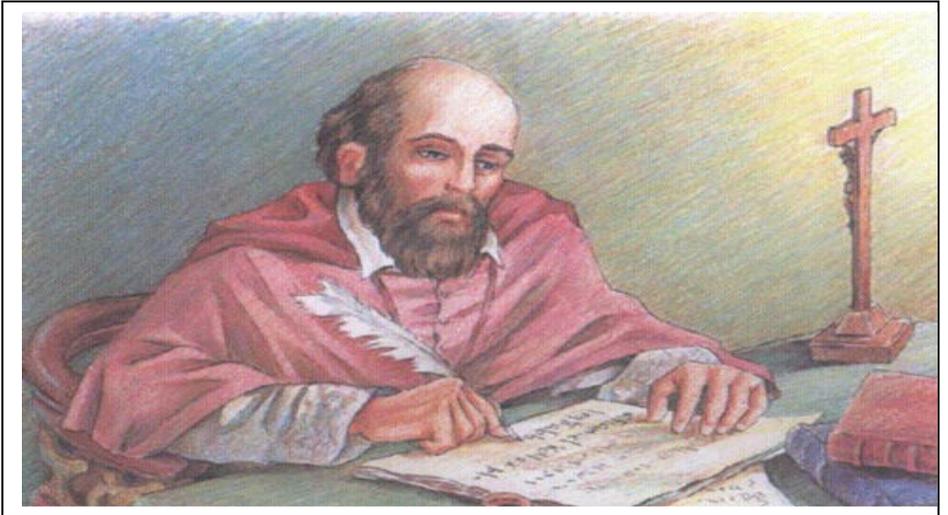
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MYTHS & TRUTHS ABOUT CATHOLIC CEMETERIES

Michael W. Hebert

The Catholic Church is filled with mysteries, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, the mystery of Jesus rising from the dead, etc. While our Catholic cemeteries are not mysterious there are persistent myths that surround them and often cause confusion. The following is an attempt to set the record straight.

Myth: The Catholic Church doesn't allow cremation.

Truth: In Vatican II the church stated it still preferred burial of the body because it more fully exemplifies our belief in resurrection of the body on the last day. However it also stated that cremation was an acceptable alternative for final disposition of the body as long as it was not done in an attempt to deny resurrection.

Myth: Once cremated, ashes can be divided among family members, scattered in various places such as a favorite hunting spot or garden, scattered on the ocean, etc. They can be turned into various keepsakes, like rings and pendants, or a small amount can be kept in a locket and worn around one's neck.

Truth: Cremated remains must be treated with the same dignity and respect as the body and must be buried or entombed, preferably in a Catholic Cemetery, intact and in a suitable vessel to await resurrection. Cremated

remains may be buried at sea such as in the case of John F. Kennedy, Jr. but again they must be intact and in a suitable vessel. Catholic cemeterians cannot and will not knowingly bury partial cremated remains in our cemeteries.

Myth: I can hold onto my spouse's ashes until I die and they can be mixed together before burial.

Truth: Cremated remains cannot be comingled. Each of us is an individual child of God and we belong to him and no one else. Catholic cemeterians can no more bury co-mingled ashes than we could bury two bodies in the same casket.

Myth: When one "buys a lot" in the cemetery they own the land and can do with it what they wish.

Truth: One does not "buy a lot", one purchases burial rights. Much like you would buy mineral rights or water rights, our Catholic cemeteries sell burial rights, which provide a license and Easement for a specific number of burials (traditional or cremation) in a specific location within the cemetery. The Easement also provides for a memorial to be erected in accordance with cemetery regulations and for perpetual care to maintain the lot in perpetuity. By selling burial rights rather than land there is no question of taxable property, we are assured the

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property will always remain a cemetery and it allows the management to set reasonable rules and regulations to assure proper maintenance of the cemetery can be performed.

Myth: Non-Catholics can't be buried in Catholic cemeteries.

Truth: Prior to Vatican II non-Catholics could not be buried in Catholic cemeteries. In fact, even Catholics had to be in good standing with the church and often times a letter from the pastor stating you were in good standing was required. Since Vatican II anyone can be buried in a Catholic cemetery and may have a service conducted by a priest or minister of their own faith. The cemetery is not obligated to and may not be able to meet special requirements of other faiths. All people wishing to be buried in Catholic cemeteries must be willing to abide by the rules and regulations set forth by the cemetery and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland.

Myth: I can sell my lot if I choose not to use it.

Truth: Your lot can be transferred to other individuals through the cemetery office but you cannot sell that which you do not own. If an individual "sells" his/her lot to another person and does not transfer rights through the cemetery office the sale is invalid and the buyer would be out whatever they paid.

Myth: If I give my Easement to a relative or friend he or she will inherit burial rights after my death.

Truth: Possession of the Easement does not constitute ownership. If you wish to assign a specific grave space to an individual or transfer remaining burial rights to someone it can be accomplished by contacting the cemetery office and filling out standard documents. If documents are not completed and filed with the cemetery office remaining burial rights are automatically passed down to the next of kin in equal portions in accordance with state law.

Myth: Graves are six feet deep.

Truth: The grave is between four and a half feet and five feet deep, leaving about 18 inches of soil over the concrete vault cover. Six feet under is reserved for the movies.

Myth: In winter burials are not made because of the snow and frozen ground. Bodies are stored in a temporary tomb and buried in the spring.

Truth: In most cemeteries located in colder climates that is the case, although at St. Francis Catholic Cemetery in Waterville winter burials are regularly made and have been for a very long time. The only difference being in winter prayers of committal are done in church and only the hearse and sometimes pall bearers are allowed into the cemetery. This restriction is for liability reasons because the conditions in the cemetery are slippery and can be hazardous. The family always has the option of waiting until spring if they wish but in most cases burial is made in winter making it somewhat easier to move forward with the grieving process and avoiding dredging up all the raw emotions again in the spring.

Fall Cleanup Facts

Michael W. Hebert

Spring may be an odd time to talk about fall cleanup; however, spring is when the majority of decorations are placed in the cemetery.

We begin our fall cleanup October 1st. Any flowers or decorations both real and artificial must be removed before that date if individuals wish to keep them. Although October 1st may seem early to some, it is a large cemetery and it takes about a month to remove all the decorations and do a final mowing and trimming, all of which must be accomplished before the leaves begin to fall. The leaves will take another two weeks or more to gather and remove. To get an idea of the volume that is removed, last year 12 3/4 cubic yards or 1,360 pounds of artificial flowers and plastic containers were removed from the cemetery. In addition, 6 1/2 cubic yards of organic material was collected and disposed of. All of this collection and disposal takes time and money.

Money that could be better spent on equipment and roads.

Please consider using methods adopted in our state parks, hiking trails and waterways. If you carry it in, carry it out. Many individuals already do a good job of cleaning out their flowerbeds and we genuinely appreciate their effort in helping to keep the cemetery clean.



Committal Service in Progress

Michael W. Hebert

We realize most people visiting the cemetery have a customary route they follow to find their lot and trying a different route can be confusing. However it is important that we show the proper respect and consideration for a committal service in progress.

It is extremely distracting and distressing to the family and friends of a deceased loved one when cars drive by close to a committal service. The committal service is a very emotional time for most people and none of us wants to add to a family's grief. Please be mindful when entering the cemetery, a service may be in progress. An unusual number of cars stopped in one place is a good indication a service is in progress. If you encounter a service, please use an alternate route to your destination. If the service is in the same section as your lot, please park a short distance away and walk or return at a later time.



Christmas Wreath Fund Raiser

Our fifth annual Christmas wreath sale to benefit the Halde Cemetery went very well. Sales were up a bit from last year. We brought in a total of \$2,952.88 after expenses. All proceeds go to benefit the Halde Cemetery. These funds, along with our annual parish collection and donations from the Bourque-Lanigan Post #5 and others continue to add up bringing our total account balance to \$42,759.20 after last summer's maintenance expenses.



Decorative Policy

In an ongoing effort to improve maintenance practices and insure the continued quality and general appearance of St. Francis Catholic Cemetery, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland and St. Francis Catholic Cemetery have adopted new rules and regulations in 1999. The following are articles that deal specifically with the decorative policy, i.e. the placement of plantings, urns, baskets, boxes and flags etc. and removal of all rubbish:

11-F Lawns-Lawns shall not be obstructed by any planting or decoration

except in the following manner: Planting of flowers must be made in front of the main above-ground monument only. Such plantings shall not exceed 14 inches in width and cannot extend beyond the base of the monument. No planting shall be made near or around any individual marker, flush or raised.

11-G Urns and Flower Vases- Placement of approved urns, vases, baskets, boxes and potted plants is restricted to the following locations: one item on either end of the main above-ground monument only. Above items may be placed in front of the monument if no plantings already exist. In the event that there is no above-ground monument on the lot, one of the items described above may be placed where the above-ground monument would be located so as not to obstruct mowing operations. Any artificial decorations must be in approved containers and placed in the above said location.

11-H Ornaments- The use of shells, crushed or bleached stones, lawn ornaments, glass containers, tin cans, vigil or perpetual lights and shepherds crooks is strictly prohibited. No lawn ornament of any kind as defined by the Management shall be allowed. The Management reserves the right to remove without notice any planting or object that is in violation of these regulations, or in the opinion of the management is a hazard to its employees or injurious to the general appearance of the cemetery.

11-I Flags- Flags may be placed on lots beginning one week before Memorial Day through Flag Day, June 14. All flags must be placed next to the main above-ground monument. No flag may be placed next to any individual markers, flush or raised. Exceptions may be made in flush marker sections and on graves with no monument privileges.

12-B Rubbish-All rubbish (including organic) must be removed from the cemetery by those persons generating the rubbish.

A full set of rules and regulations are available for your inspection at the Cemetery office.



Q & A

- Q) Can I place a vigil light, candle or solar powered light on my lot?
- A) We do not allow a flame or lights of any kind for three simple reasons. First, lights in the cemetery at night attract attention which, like moths to a flame, attracts vandals. Lights are broken or stolen and often the vandalism escalates to tipping over monuments. Second, whether the lights are broken due to vandalism or the elements, the glass or plastic ends up in the grass and becomes dangerous projectiles when hit by a lawn mower or trimmer. Third, dry grass in the summer is easily ignited by a candle that may be tipped over. We have had one grass fire and a burned Teddy bear in two separate incidences.
- Q) My parents left me the Easement to the cemetery lot. Does that mean that I now own it?
- A) Unless Burial Rights were mentioned specifically in the owners will, remaining rights to the lot pass in equal portions to the direct descendants of the original owner, according to the laws of intestate of the State of Maine. Possession of the Easement by itself does not constitute ownership.

We would like to thank our sponsors for making this newsletter possible. The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of our sponsors.

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